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Christianization of the Philippines

Revisiting the Contributions of Baroque Churches and Religious Art

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Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to discussion on how the Catholic religion took root, spread, survived, and progressed in the Philippines. It seeks to address the Christianization of the pre-Hispanic Filipinos and the subsequent embedded-ment of the Church in indigenous culture. It also discusses on H. Richard Niehbur's typology of the gospel-culture relationship as discussed by De Mesa (2007). From the fundamental congruencies between Filipino traditional religion and Catholic Christianity, this paper asserts that the lack of tension between the traditional religion of the native Filipinos and Catholicism allowed Christianity to take root, develop, and dominate in the Philippines. In addition, the entrenchment of the Church in indigenous culture and its expression in church architecture, religious art, and popular devotions specifically in the Church of Saint James the Great at Paete, Laguna and San Pedro de Alcantara Church at Pakil, Laguna are discussed. This is to correlate the important contributions of Baroque churches and religious art in the Christianization of the people in the Philippines.

Keywords

Baroque – church – Christianity – Philippines – religious art – gospel and culture – architecture – Catholicism

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The Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 divided the known world between Spain and Portugal. This allowed the rulers of the Iberian empires to control the administration of Catholicism in newly-encountered realms in return for a commitment to evangelization in non-Christian societies. This agreement was to have a permanent impact on the history of the Philippines as Catholicism became the dominant religion in the country (Andaya 2010).

Cultural anthropologists and historians are in agreement that the indigenous Filipinos had a traditional religion before the Spanish expedition reached Samar Island, Philippines on 17 March 1521 (Neill 1964; Fernandez 1979; Sitoy 1985; Domingo 2007). How did the Catholic religion become rooted in the Philippines and prosper when the pre-Hispanic Filipinos already had an indigenous religion? Sitoy puts the question succinctly, “Why and how did the majority of Filipinos come to accept the Catholic religion as an alternative (or in some cases as a supplement) to their indigenous religious beliefs?” (1985:iii).

This paper aims to contribute to discussion on how the Catholic religion took root, spread, survived, and progressed in the Philippines. It seeks to address the Christianization of the pre-Hispanic Filipinos and the subsequent embedded-ment of the Church in indigenous culture. The study revisits the initial contact of the Spanish expedition led by Ferdinand Magellan among the native Filipino inhabitants of Samar, Philippines and the early proselytization efforts of the Spanish Catholic missionaries. The study also reflects on H. Richard Niehbur’s typology of gospel-culture relationship as discussed by De Mesa (2007). From the said typology, the fundamental congruencies between Filipino traditional religion and Catholic Christianity are drawn. From the fundamental congruencies, the paper asserts that the lack of tension between the traditional religion of the native Filipinos and Catholicism allowed Christianity to take root, develop, and dominate in the Philippines. The embedded-ment of the Church in indigenous culture and its expression in church architecture, religious art, and popular devotions, specifically in the church of Saint James the Great at Paete, Laguna and San Pedro de Alcantara church at Pakil, Laguna are also discussed.

Opening Up a Pathway to the Domestication of Christianity in the Philippines

On 10 August 1519, Ferdinand Magellan led a five-boat fleet called Armada de Molucca from the port of Seville, Spain to search for a new trade route to the Moluccas (Maluku, Indonesia). Andaya (2010) narrates that the Portuguese Ferdinand Magellan assumed the Visayan archipelago in the Philippines

to be the “Spice Islands.” He offered his services to King Carlos of Spain and promised to attain Catholic goals and help Spain achieve hegemony over the known world.

Ferdinand Magellan’s Armada de Molucca sailed westward and after two grueling and perilous years at sea reached the Islas de Los Ladrones (Mariana Islands, Micronesia). Surviving one shipwreck and a mutiny, the reduced Armada de Molucca reached Homonhon Island (Eastern Samar, Philippines) on 17 March 1521. Ferdinand Magellan and his crew sailed on to an island-port in the Philippines called Mazzaua where they celebrated the first Mass. On 7 April 1521, the three-boat fleet and remaining crew of Magellan entered the port of Zzubu (Cebu, Philippines). Through the urging of Ferdinand Magellan, the kinglet of Zzubu named Raja Humabon, his wife, and around 800 natives received the sacrament of baptism in the Catholic Church. As a gift from the Spaniards, the wife of Raja Humabon received a wooden carving of the Christ Child or *Santo Niño* (Skeleton 1969). Ilustre (1965) adds that Antonio Pigafetta, the Italian chronicler of Ferdinand Magellan, also gave the wife of Raja Humabon a statue of the Virgin with the Christ Child. The wife of Raja Humabon was given the Christian name Juana and Rajah Humabon received the Christian name Carlos. Catindig states that the example of the rulers of Cebu was immediately followed by their subjects. Soon, throngs of native Filipinos of Cebu were baptized, including those from neighboring islands. “A record made by Maximilianus Transylvanus placed the number of newly baptized Christians at 2,200” (1965:25).

Nobody can ever know the inner workings of God’s grace but one cannot help but wonder why the native Filipinos of Cebu accepted the Christian religion of Spaniards. Catindig believes that fear and greed moved the native Filipinos to accept the Catholic faith. He says, “The Filipino natives were afraid that that they would all be destroyed should they refuse the faith of the visitors” (1965:23). Catindig also narrates the description of Pigafetta about the Spanish Armada: “As handkerchiefs wipe off the sweat, so did our arms overthrow and destroy all our adversaries and those who hate our faith” (1965:23). As for greed, Catindig explains that Magellan told the kinglet Humabon that upon being a Christian, he would be able to conquer his enemies and the natives will have a suit of armor that will make them invulnerable.

While Catindig’s argument on “fear, greed, and Christianization” is plausible, an event narrated by Ilustre about the re-discovery of Queen Juana’s *Santo Niño* points to other possible reasons for the Christianization of native Filipinos. On 28 April 1565, long after the survivors of Ferdinand Magellan’s expedition had left Philippine waters forever, the wood carving of the *Santo Nino* owned by

Queen Juana was discovered by one of the soldiers in the expeditionary force headed by Miguel Lopez De Legazpi. Legazpi's testimony said that:

[...] on the day when we entered this village one of the soldiers went to a large and well-built house of an Indian woman where he found an image of the child Jesus. This was kept in its cradle, all gilded, just as it was brought from España, and only the little cross which is generally placed upon the globe in its hand is missing. This image was well-kept in that house, and many flowers were found before it, no one knows for what object or purpose [...] (1965:131).

If the native Filipinos were moved by fear and greed to accept the Christian religion why then did the image of the Santo Nino remain intact long after Magellan was killed and the survivors of his Spanish expedition had left the country? In fact, after almost five centuries, the very same image of the Santo Nino is extant, which makes it the oldest among Philippine *santo* (religious images). Thus, this paper explores other possible reasons for the Christianization of the native Filipinos.

Traditional Religious Constructs of the Pre-Hispanic Tagalog of Luzon

The Filipino natives of Luzon believed in a Supreme Being. Sitoy describes the Supreme Being as "one who stands at the apex of a scale of powerful spirits; or as a categorical description of an all-pervading divine characteristic or function" (1985:12). The Supreme Being is called by different names among the different ethno-linguistic groups in Luzon: *Kadak'lan* (Ifugaos of northern Luzon), *Miglalang* (natives of Pampanga province), *Malayari* (natives of Zambales province), and *Bathala* (native Tagalog people of Luzon). Also, the names *Bathalang Maykapal* (*Bathala* the Creator) or *Panginoong Bathala* (The Lord Bathala) is used by the Tagalog people even after they have been converted to Christianity. The name Bathala was so embedded in the traditional religion of the pre-Hispanic natives of Luzon that they do not know any other name in their language to give to the Lord God except Bathala (Sitoy 1985).

For the purpose of this study, discussion on traditional religious constructs of pre-Hispanic Filipino natives and Christianization will be limited to the Tagalog of Luzon, Philippines. Sitoy (1985) details the relationship between the great Lord Bathala and the *anito*. For the Tagalog people, the *anito* are

lesser divinities who act as ministers of Bathala. All *anito* have specific functions or offices. The natives believe that there are *anito* for the rice fields, for the sea, for battles, and for curing diseases. Francisco (1965) speaks of an *anito* called *Dian Masalanta* who was the patron of lovers and generations. Another *anito* called *Lacanbaco* was believed to be the god of the fruits of the earth while the *anito* *Lacanpatiis* was believed to water the fields and provide fish from the sea. The Tagalog people also believed that Bathala was such a great Lord that no one may speak to him. However, the *anito* can effectually intercede before him for and on behalf of humankind. It is to the *anito* which the sixteenth century Filipinos called upon and offered sacrifices to when they desired anything.

The importance of *anito* as ministers and intercessors is narrated in an Ifugao myth shared by Florentino Hornedo in Mercado's (2000) *Filipino Popular Devotions, the Interior Dialogue between Traditional Religion and Christianity*. According to Hornedo, the god *Hinumbiyan* was displeased with an Ifugao farmer who always planted on the rice terraces and harvested but never thanked the gods. *Hinumbiyan* then made the farmer suffer from a stomach ache. The farmer, in search of a cure for his affliction, consulted a religious functionary who is knowledgeable about the invisible world. The religious functionary performed a ritual before an *anito* who functions as a god-messenger. The *anito* told the religious functionary that *Hinumbiyan* was unhappy with the farmer because he did not offer thanksgiving rituals to the gods for his harvests. In the end, the farmer was instructed by the religious functionary to roast animals as a thanksgiving sacrifice after each harvest season.

The native Filipinos also had the *anito* represented in tangible forms as idols called *likha* or *larawan*. However, Francisco (1965) argues that it cannot be determined if a *likha* is an actual representation of an *anito*. Nonetheless, the native Filipinos believed that a *likha* carries an efficacy called *bisa* or *potensiya*. Even today, the traditional belief in the power of a *likha* is customary among Filipino devotees. Mercado (2000) speaks of a popular Filipino devotion called "*punas-punas*" or the wiping or touching of a sacred image with a piece of cloth (usually a handkerchief printed with Catholic "formula" prayers). The devotees believe that the handkerchief that touched the sacred image has obtained a *bisa* or efficacy to cure sicknesses and ward off evil spirits.

Sitoy adds that among these religious functionaries of the native Filipinos were "priests and priestesses who came by various names, according to the ethno-linguistic area" (1985:18). For the Tagalog people, the *catalona* served as the priest (or priestess) who led the community in rituals and sacrifices, especially in feasts celebrated by the chiefs. However, the native Filipinos did not have churches as places of worship or sacrifice. Instead, sacrifices were

made at the chief's house where a shelter for the "*nagaanito*" or worshippers was erected. Domingo mentions Reuel Almocera's assertion that the indigenous Filipinos "honored the spirits with rituals and feast days because these supernatural beings were considered able to preside over the whole gamut of life, including birth, sickness, courtship, marriage, planting, harvesting, and death. Some of these spirits were considered friendly; others were viewed as tyrannical enemies" (2005:424). The rites and rituals of the native Filipinos reflect Tylor's animistic theory of the origin of religion among "Primitive people developing a sense of 'other' or 'soul' from experiences with death and dreams":

These souls (anima) were to be found not only in people, but in all of nature. These spirits could be helpful or harmful to humans and had personalities that could be offended or flattered. Therefore, it became a part of the life of primitive societies to pray to these spirits, to offer sacrifices to them, to seek to appease them, and to avoid offending them (Hopfe 1979:22).

The autochthonous religion of the native Filipinos had sufficiently guided their temporal and spiritual needs before the Spanish missionaries came. Domingo mentions Leonard Mercado's view on the intimate link between the traditional religion of the indigenous people and their life:

Traditional religions have no scriptures; no founder no hierarchy, no religious organizations and the complexities which are associated with the world religions. In lieu of scriptures the indigenous people have their myths, proverbs, customs, and codes of conduct which have been handed down from past generations. . . . The indigenous peoples do not classify reality as supernatural or natural but as the invisible and visible, the profane and the sacred, the body and the soul. . . . Religion for the indigenous peoples is not something cerebral like a set of dogmas but as part of life itself. Because religion and life permeate each other, the indigenous peoples almost have no distinction between religion and culture (2007:428–429).

Domingo describes animistic religion as "having nothing to do either with magic or with false worship. It is now a word that is used to describe a different way of relating with the divine other than that of the western way or classical paradigm" (2007:430).

The Gospel-Culture Relationship of Traditional Filipino Religion and Catholicism

The indigenous people of the Philippines had a worldview and religion of their own before the Catholic missionaries came to the Philippines (Fernandez 1979; Domingo 2007). Add to that the limited number of missionary priests in the Philippines and Christianization becomes a very challenging and arduous task (Coseteng 1972; Fernandez 1979). Despite limitations, the Catholic Church took root in the Philippines and prospered. Could a gospel-culture relationship have contributed to the Christianization of the native Filipinos?

De Mesa describes the different forms of gospel-culture relationship according to a typology outlined by H. Richard Niehbur. He explains that the typology “allows us to observe and situate the accent of particular theologies of inculturation within a spectrum of interactions between Christianity and culture” (2007:56). De Mesa mentions folk Catholicism in the Philippines as an example of the “second type of relationship between Gospel and culture”, where one finds a fundamental but not total agreement between gospel and culture. In this second type,

There is no great tension between being Christian and being a member of a cultural group. People who subscribe to this outlook seem to feel more or less equally at home in the community of believers and in the community of culture. The Gospel is understood with the resources of the culture and the culture is interpreted through the Gospel (2007:59).

De Mesa explains further:

The striking similarity between the roles of the indigenous spirits and the Catholic saints as understood by the native population illustrates this. Though officially presented by the Church as particular models of holiness, the saints are regarded like the spirits who are asked to grant favors, to refrain from inflicting harm or remove the harm they had inflicted. Interest in the powers of the spirits spill over to what the saints are capable of doing. If there are spirits of particular places, or definite life phases or specific needs, there are also singular saints with their respective specialties. (2007:60)

Utilizing the second type of gospel-culture relationship identified by De Mesa (2007) and the traditional indigenous religion of pre-Hispanic Filipinos in Luzon (Sitoy, 1985; Francisco, 1965; Mercado, 2000), the following table

compares the fundamental religious constructs of the traditional religion of the Tagalog of Luzon and Catholicism. The traditional religion of the native Filipinos and Catholicism have similar religious constructs. They both have a Supreme Being, intermediaries to the Supreme Being, priests, acts of worship, places of worship, and religious images.

TABLE 1 [AQ: Please provide title]

Religious constructs	Traditional religion	Catholicism
Supreme Being	Bathala	God
Intermediaries to the Supreme Being	Anito	saints
Ritual officials	Catalona	priests
Acts of worship	prayers, sacrifices, and feasts	mass, prayers, and feasts
Places of worship	Sibi	church
Religious images	likha or larawan	religious icons

Looking back at the initial encounter of the native Filipinos of Cebu with Ferdinand Magellan and the baptism of the subjects of Raja Humabon, it can be seen that there was no great tension between being Christian and being a member of a cultural group. It was earlier mentioned in this paper that nobody can ever know the inner workings of God's grace. However, Tupayupanqui explains that God manifests the Divine Self and is present in indigenous culture:

First, faith is a free gift of God given to men and women from all eras in histories and cultures. Theology is not developed with the purpose of believing in God because belief in God exists prior to an understanding of our faith. Secondly, theology is a critical intellectual aspect of our faith; therefore it is a human and cultural product. It is a way to understand ourselves and the world around us from the perspective of faith. Third, the uniqueness of the Christian faith is the historic revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus of Nazareth by his death and resurrection became the Christ of our faith. He was incarnated, born, raised, and lived and died in a particular historical time and under the parameters of Jewish culture. Therefore, the departure point of our theology is the faith in Jesus Christ and the manifestations of God present as “the seeds of the word” in the indigenous traditions of our cultures (2010:89).

Tupayupangi's assertion is in consonance with Fanning's (2009) view on the translatability of the universal Christian faith into the forms and symbols of an indigenous culture. This translatability is our departure point for the assertion that similar religious constructs between the Christian faith and the native culture of the Filipinos contributed to the acceptance, development, and dominance of the Catholic faith in the Philippines.

The Franciscan Missionaries, Mission Complexes, and Baroque Art

Mention must be made of the foundations and beginnings of the Catholic faith in the Philippines in order better to appreciate how the Catholic faith has been translated into the native culture, the subsequent development of a popular Catholic Filipino culture, and various faith expressions made manifest in Filipino colonial church architecture and religious art.

In 1565, the first Catholic missionaries of the Augustinian order arrived in the Philippines. The Franciscans came in 1578, followed by the Jesuits in 1581, the Dominicans in 1587, and the Recollects in 1606 (Domingo 2007). Following a decree by King Phillip of Spain that assigned different religious orders to certain territories of work, the Augustinians occupied the provinces of *Pampanga*, *Ilocos*, *Cebu*, and *Panay*. The Franciscans occupied the territory around *Laguna de Bai* (Laguna) and the *Camarines* while the Dominicans covered *Bataan*, *Pangasinan*, and the *Cagayan Valley*. The Jesuits occupied some of the *Visayan Islands*, *Zambales*, and *Mindanao*. The Recollects took as an assignment the Christianization of *Northern Mindanao* and *Palawan* (Guillen 2012). Andaya (2010) mentions Sitoy's assertion that the primary aim of the religious orders was to win souls. Domingo adds that Horacio de la Costa described the missionaries as "priests who spiritually belonged to the Church of the Counter-Reformation and intellectually belonging to the Age of the Baroque" (2007:422).

When the Spaniards arrived, the early Filipinos lived in small settlements or villages called *barangay*. The *barangay* are scattered in the valleys and along the rivers. Poddar, Patke, and Jensen (2008) narrate that out of scattered settlements along rivers and coasts, the Spaniards created nucleated settlements with the church as the focal point. They introduced the European system of settlement based on a grid pattern of roads and clustering of buildings and houses around the church. This became the plaza complex of today which serves as the *bayan* or *centro* of every town. Also, the natives were asked to live near the church in a process called *reduccion*. However, this work of systemic reduction had limited success because the Filipino natives (called *Indios*) were subsistence farmers and fishermen who needed to stay near their source of

food. As a response, the *visita* system was implemented by the missionary priests. Coseteng (1972) explains that a *visita* is a small chapel constructed in a *sitio* or hamlet attached to a town or a bigger settlement. It is intended to facilitate religious and civil administration. The small chapels were visited regularly by the parish priest of the mother town. Masses were celebrated, and marriages and baptisms were performed on the appointed day at the *visita*. Each town became the nucleus of the outlying *visita* as it extended its jurisdiction over the parishioners beyond the boundaries of the municipality. In time, the *visita* prospered as people came to stay and they became independent municipalities.

Laguna de Bai (province of Laguna) was pacified around the year 1578 and the gospel was brought to the widely scattered inhabitants by the Franciscan missionaries Juan de Plasencia and Diego de Oropesa. Coseteng (1972) narrates that the missionaries zealously covered their religious territory by foot and canoe. Guillen adds that Father Juan de Plasencia was fluent in Tagalog (the native language of the people from Laguna de Bai) and translated the *Doctrina Cristiana* (book of Christian doctrine) for the catechumens. Furthermore, De Plasencia's descriptions of the parishioners' customs were "concise but comprehensible, indicating personal experience, careful observation and thoughtful reflection" (2012:3).

A few years later, the efforts of the missionaries bore fruit and towns were established along the lake area: *Lumbang, Baras, Morong, Siniloan, Pangil, Paete, Majayjay, Nagcarlan*, and others. As for the colonial mission architecture, Coseteng (1972) describes how the church-*convento*-atrium complex of monastic and mission architecture found in Mexico became the pattern for the Philippines. The mission, as an architectural complex, became the center of the community around which the social and religious lives of the people revolved. In the mission complex one can find the church, the bell tower, the atrium or the front courtyard, and there is another yard behind the convent or *convento* (the residence of a parish priest).

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, a new artistic style emerged in Rome. Called 'Baroque Art', it exaggerated motion and detail in art forms to evoke human emotions, produce drama, build tension, and create a sense of awe. In iconography, Baroque representational art was direct, simple, obvious, and dramatic. In architecture, Baroque structures and its embellishments appealed to the senses and aimed to show opulence and power. During the Counter-reformation movement, Baroque art was instrumental in the way the Roman Catholic Church reached out to its Christian followers and catechumens. The simple, obvious, and dramatic Baroque representational art was consonant with the canon promulgated at the Council of Trent wherein

paintings and sculptures in church contexts should speak to the illiterate rather than to the well-informed. To assert its “triumph” over the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church incorporated Baroque architecture in its new churches. The form, light and shadow, and dramatic intensity of the Baroque style churches appealed to the visceral senses of the laity and demonstrated the wealth and power of the Catholic Church.

Filipino Colonial Baroque Architecture

But what is Filipino colonial Baroque? Baroque architecture, as understood in Europe, reached the Philippines through an indirect route. In fact, to define Filipino colonial Baroque entails a description of the factors and conditions that led to the adaptation of Baroque to the Philippines. Since the Spanish missionaries who arrived in the Philippines came from Spanish-America, the monastic and mission architecture found there became the pattern of colonial mission architecture in the Philippines. Add to that the grueling and perilous journey at sea and consequently a dire lack of master-artisans from Spain to work in the Philippines. Thus, the friars themselves became the architects of the churches and other buildings of the mission complex. The lack of available materials such as cement, tiles, wood, and brick contributed to the delay in church construction. As a result, there were times when a new priest replaced the priest of a still unfinished church. When this happened, a new design might be laid over the old one, affecting the final design. Furthermore, calamities such as earthquakes, fires, and Moro raids had to be considered in designing (or renovating) a church. These factors among others affected the aesthetic and structural design of the Filipino colonial Baroque churches in the Philippines. However, the *raison d'être* of the church building remained. It is a place for divine worship which “signifies and makes visible the Church living in the place, the dwelling of God with people reconciled and united in Christ” (CCC 1180). Coseteng (1972) claims that typical Filipino colonial Baroque churches can be found in the Franciscan territories of Rizal, Laguna, Quezon, and the Bicol Peninsula.

Church of St James the Great at Paete, Laguna

The town of Paete was founded in 1580 by Father Juan de Plasencia. The name Paete was derived from the Tagalog word *paet* or chisel as a tribute to the town's people's skills in woodcarving. Layug narrates that:

The first Catholic church in Paete, Laguna was built in 1646. It was made of local materials such as wood, bamboo, rattan, nipa, palm, and cogon grass. Through the efforts of Father Francisco de la Fuente a stone church was constructed in 1717. Unfortunately, the church was destroyed by an earthquake in 1880 wherein the roof and part of the walls were destroyed. In 1884, Father Pedro Gallano rebuilt the church which was again damaged by an earthquake in 1937. The church was renovated in 1980. The church of St James the Great was declared a National Historical Site in 1981 (2007:120).

Coseteng (1972) describes the *Church of St James the Great* as an expression of the influence of Baroque architecture on local colonial churches. The church follows a rectangular plan: single nave, transept, and a cupola at the crossing. Layug describes the façade and bell tower filled with ornate design. He adds:

St. James the Great has a semi-circular arched main entrance and windows and plump pilasters carved with floral motifs. Its pediment, which forms the second level has a bas-relief at the tympanum (recessed space) depicting the equestrian St. James defeating the Moors and serried pinnacles above the raking cornice. On the right hand is a Muslim-inspired bell tower with a terraced pointed dome. In front of the church is a small plaza (2007:120).

Domingo mentions de la Costa's observation that Baroque is not only about art but about the Spaniards' imperial vision of life. "Europeans by nature and providence were meant to rule and the non-Europeans to be ruled. And this was a view held particularly by the Spanish missionaries" (2007:422). Coseteng supports this view and describes the friars as having grander plans: "The friars realized that churches and *convento* had to be built in as impressive a scale and as grandiose a manner as possible if they were to instill a sense of awe and wonder in the native about the majesty of the Christian God and the mystical nature of the cult. . . . It was necessary to show the *Indios* the utmost grandeur outwardly so that the native might recognize the majesty of the deity by the exterior" (1972: 6).

In the Philippines, a church's national historical marker often lists the priest(s) and significant dates that led to the construction of the said church. The national historical marker at St James the Great church is no different. However, if we are to follow the thought of Fe Arriola that "language reflects not only what people think, but also the *way* people think" (Domingo 2007:418), then we can see that such historical markers fall short in acknowledging the

builders of the church. It is well accounted in Philippine history that village communities furnished the friars and parish priests with contributions of food, supplies, and free labor in building churches (Andaya 2010). Mention must be made of the Paete craftsmen and their mastery in woodcarving who designed and constructed the church of St James. Coseteng tells us:

It must have been this artistic tradition, the discipline and the feeling for the medium, which the artisans who carved the façade of the church had transmitted on the stone surface. The hard stone has been transformed by their chisels into a soft, pliant surface completely covered with flowing breathing forms. The façade of the church in *Paete* is not only a manifestation of local reaction to Baroque influence but also a reflection of the artistry and exuberance of the people (1972:123).

The people of Paete find close affinity with the church. A devotee of St James the Great said,

Is not our church very beautiful?
We hope that we can keep it that way.
We hope that our faith will be as strong and unshakeable as our church.
May we be faithful sons and daughters of God, followers of Christ, and one with the Roman Catholic Church.
We hope that we have a clear conscience like our clean church.
Let us preach and defend our faith. (Author's translation)

Every Thursday, the devotees of St James the Great gather at the church to celebrate Mass and pray. This Thursday Devotion is highlighted by the exposition and kissing of a relic of St James.

During Lent, parishioners are invited to the exhibit at the parish hall where religious icons are displayed to the public. The organizers claim that the exhibit showcases the woodcarving skill and artistry of the people of Paete and an expression of faith by the people. Regarding the Holy Wednesday procession, Glenn Martinez writes,

Inside the centuries-old church of Paete was a festival of *carroza* [floats]. The pews were purposely removed to give way to the massive carriages bearing the images of saints, via crucis celebrities and selected scenes from the Bible. . . . Completely decorated with flowers and fully illuminated, standing out from the *carroza* are the statues carved by the town's artisans. All the statues are family heirlooms and are safeguarded at all

costs. . . . During World War II, the heads and hands of the statues were taken to the hills to hide them while the enemy torched the entire town to the ground. . . . According to local tradition whoever inherits the statue also inherits a rice field, at a very least a hectare in size. A large portion of the income from the field is allocated for the statues maintenance, its dress, accessories, carroza, lights and flowers when it is taken out on the processions. The rest of the money is spent when the owner of the *santo* must open their house to all devotees of the statue for a whole day of feasting. (2012: para. 5–6)

The woodcarving skills and creativity of the people of *Paete* are showcased in the religious art at St James the Great Church. The wooden *Stations of the Cross* and *Last Supper* are hand-carved as well as the Baroque reredos (the artistic decoration behind the altar). Crocodile heads are sculpted on beams supporting the choir loft. There are two paintings of St Christopher on the rear left side of the church. Some paintings of Dans (a native of Paete) include *Purgatorio* (depicting the eight under-worldly punishments of cold, darkness, devil, fire, hopelessness, remorse, whiplash, and worms) and *Langit, Lupa, at Impierno* (Heaven, Earth, and Hell). Along the nave are two catechetical paintings showing the Seven Sacraments and the *Jucio Final* or Final Judgment. The local artist Bartolome Balatino also contributed gold *retablos* (small devotional paintings) to the church called “The Assumption” and “The Descent of the Holy Spirit.”

The church of St James the Great at *Paete, Laguna* from its Baroque architecture, façade, and religious art reflects De Mesa’s (2007) assertion that the gospel is being understood with the resources of the culture, while the culture is being interpreted through the gospel.

San Pedro de Alcantara Church at Pakil, Laguna

In 1684, the townsfolk of Pakil, Laguna built San Pedro de Alcantara church using nipa and bamboos. Through the initiative of Fernando Jaro the stone church and convent was constructed in the year 1732. Since then, San Pedro de Alcantara church has undergone numerous renovations, survived calamities, and been through various repairs and restorations. Yet, the church’s Baroque architecture has remained intact. Layug describes the design and architecture of San Pedro de Alcantara church as follows:

The church’s three-story Baroque façade is bounded by slightly raised entablatures and it is heavily molded especially at the door jambs,

statued niches, and window openings. Above the entrance door is the Spanish coat of arms. The pediment, its tympanum heavily decorated with extended stone piers, has a centrally located statued niche framed by coupled columns and oversized keystone and flanked by molded circular windows. The raking cornice is decorated with the Egyptian coil spiral. The central openings decrease in size as they reach the pediment. The niche is flanked by double pillars which support a rich, ornately framed entablature. The bell tower on the left is also heavily decorated (2007:122).

Every 15th of September, the town of Pakil, Laguna celebrates the Turumba festival. The carved statue of the Nuestra Señora de los Dolores de Turumba is placed atop a centuries-old anda (carozza) and a procession is led by the priest followed by dancing, clapping, and chanting devotees. According to oral tradition, on 15 September 1788 some Filipino fishermen at Laguna de Bai retrieved a painted image of Our Lady of Sorrows from the lake. The fishermen tried to bring the image to the church of Paete but the tide caused them to drift away from the town's shore. The fishermen then decided to sail to Pakil. At the lake-shore, the fishermen left the image of Our Lady of Sorrows on top of a flat rock. The townspeople of Pakil saw the image and were surprised to discover that nobody could pry the painting off the rock. The town priest Padre Soriano was informed about the mystery. After the mass, the townsfolk gathered around the image. As Padre Soriano touched the image, the people started jumping around and clapped to express their joy and amazement. It was only then that Padre Soriano was able to lift the image from the rock. The people were overjoyed and continued their dancing as they brought the image to church (Martinez 2008).

When the image is taken on a procession, the devotees chant a special hymn to the Virgin Mary. It speaks of the oral tradition about the discovery of the image of Our Lady of Sorrows from the Laguna as well as the joy of the people:

Turumba, Turumba Mariangga!
 Let us rejoice and be glad.
 Dance the Tu-turumba,
 Praise to the Virgin Mary, to the Virgin!

Turumba, Turumba for the Virgin!
 Let us rejoice and be merry!
 Let us dance the Turumba!
 Praise to the Virgin Mary, to the Virgin!

It was Friday when you were found,
 Sunday when you were lifted.
 Dance the Tu-turumba!
 Praise to the Virgin Mary, to the Virgin!

Turumba, Turumba for the Virgin!
 Turumba, Turumba for the Virgin!
 Let us dance the Turumba!
 Praise to the Virgin Mary. (Author's translation)

Martinez mentions Anita Feleo's account about the *bisa* (efficacy) of the image: "She [the Virgin of Turumba] currently owns more than 300 gowns and wears each one only once for every two weeks. After her dress is changed, the used garment is cut into tiny squares. These are given away as amulets" (2008: para. 8). The piece of cloth from the Virgin's dress is believed to protect a person carrying it from accidents, fire and other calamities.

San Pedro de Alcantara church also houses religious art done by local artists who aimed to teach the laity about Catholic saints and doctrines. The dome of the church has a painted mural that shows the mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ. On the side altar is an image of the *Crucified Christ* flanked by the *Sorrowful Mother* and *St John the Evangelist*. On the wall beside the pulpit is a painting entitled *Judicium Finale* (Final Judgment) which depicts the end of days, heaven, and hell. Other paintings include *Cahuluhulihanna Darating sa mga Tao* (The Final Things that Will Come to Humans), St Francis receiving the stigmata, and St Peter of Alcantara receiving the host (Layug 2007). Martinez adds, "From the right side of the aisle is a hand-carved life-size image of the Crucified Christ. It is the same image that is brought down to be laid on a bier to serve as the *Santo Entierro* (dead Christ on a bier) for Pakil's Good Friday rites" (2008: para. 5).

Conclusion

Cultural anthropologists and historians are in agreement that the indigenous Filipinos had an autochthonous religion. This survey of the religious constructs of Filipino native religion and the Catholic faith has shown that there are similarities between the two. Even in other parts of the world and in modern times, studies such as that of Fanning show the reciprocal and critical interaction of the various elements of culture and religion taking place:

A North African former Sufi mystic noted with approval that there was no gap between the moral profession and the practice of Christians as he saw. An Omani woman explained that Christians treat women as equals. Some poor people said the expatriate Christian workers they knew had adopted, contrary to their expectations, a simple lifestyle, wearing clothes and observing local customs of not eating pork, drinking alcohol, or touching those of the opposite sex (2009:8).

The congruent religious constructs, the embedded-ment of Catholic faith into the Filipino culture, and the expressions of Catholic faith through Philippine colonial Baroque architecture and religious art have contributed to the Christianization of the Tagalog in Luzon. However, De Mesa tells us:

The insistence of the official Church to propagate Christianity from the 17th century onwards through the medium of European cultural categories gave way to the unintended effect of encouraging people all the more to go in a different direction and appropriate the faith in their own cultural way and develop a popular religiosity. Confronted by a religious tradition which was embodied in cultural terms generally foreign to them, Filipinos selected, modified and elaborated certain elements drawn from the Christian faith to fit in the structure of their culturally defined ways of doing things (2007:59–60)

In the same vein, Fanning speaks of Darrell Whiteman's view of how to communicate the gospel "in word and deed and to establish the Church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture" (2009:2)

Undeniably, the friar missionaries succeeded in their effort to Christianize the native Filipinos. However, since the friar missionaries communicated the gospel using their own cultural-historical paradigm, the Filipinos have re-appropriated their faith and practice folk Catholicism. De Mesa explains:

Although the official Church today concurs with this fundamental harmony between folk Catholicism and the cultural values, it also thinks that the proper attitude towards such practices is one of critical respect, encouragement, and renewal. There is a need to foster these popular religious practices in such a way that they do not become distortions of

religion or remain at the level of superficial forms of worship, but become rather true expressions of faith. To this end, we must have the courage to correct what leads to fanaticism or maintains people infantile in their faith. (2007:60–61)

Fanning queried, “In order to communicate the Gospel effectively, how much does a Western missionary have to adapt to a new culture?” (2009:7). It has been mentioned in this paper that one of the early missionaries translated the *Doctrina Cristiana* into *Tagalog* so that it could be understood by the catechumens. Also, the Filipino colonial Baroque churches incorporated the artistic skills, creativity, and nuance of the culture of the native Filipinos. Furthermore, the friar missionaries actively engaged in communicating the Catholic faith in language, deeds, churches, and religious icons until Catholicism was absorbed by the people within the ritual, belief, and value system of their indigenous culture. However, folk Catholicism or popular religiosity developed and is still widely practiced among Filipino Catholics. The answer then to Fanning’s question is a call and a challenge: A missionary must preach the Gospel in such a way that the people can follow Christ but still remain true to their culture.

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